

East Lakeshore Drive Traffic Study

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This post is intended as a follow-up to an earlier post this summer regarding concerns related to motor vehicle accidents and speeding on East Lakeshore Drive. Over the past few months, a study has been conducted including a detailed analysis of traffic volumes, vehicle speeds, and other traffic characteristics along East Lakeshore Drive, as well as an analysis of all known motor vehicle accidents that have occurred along this roadway over the past few years.

East Lakeshore Drive is a Class II Town Highway. State law defines a Class II Town Highway as follows; *“Class 2 town highways are those town highways selected as the most important highways in each town. As far as practicable they shall be selected with the purposes of securing trunk lines of improved highways from town to town and to places which by their nature have more than normal amount of traffic. The selectmen, with the approval of the Agency, shall determine which highways are to be class 2 highways”* The traffic volumes on East Lakeshore Drive average approximately 6,500 vehicles per day during the busy summer months. This volume accounts for an average 24 hour period and includes all traffic traveling in both directions. While this is not a significant amount of traffic even for Vermont standards, certainly East Lakeshore Drive legitimately functions as a Class II Town Highway.

The current posted speed limit along East Lakeshore Drive is 30mph. The traffic investigation concluded that the average 85th percentile speed for both directions was 37mph, or 7mph above the current posted speed limit. The 85th percentile speed simply means that 85% of all drivers are operating at or below this speed.

The establishment of speed limits on public transportation systems within the United States is guided by the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices Manual. The most significant criterion evaluated is the 85th percentile speed. In the majority of cases, the 85th percentile speed results are used to set the speed limits on roadways within the state and the country. Research results indicate that speed limits set using the 85th percentile speeds are not only acceptable to the majority of motorists, but also fall within the speed range where crash risk is the lowest.

To better understand the logic behind the 85th percentile speed, it is based on the premise that by in large, the majorities of motor vehicle operators are responsible and conscientious people, and will drive at a reasonable speed that does not endanger the public. This does not mean there are not a smaller percentage of drivers who exceed these reasonable speeds. However, when establishing speed limits along public roadways, it is thought to be better to accommodate the majority of responsible drivers as opposed to inconveniencing them for a small percentage of unreasonable drivers.

The fact that the measured 85th percentile speed is 7 mph above the current posted speed limit is generally an indication that the current speed limit on East Lakeshore Drive is actually too low. In 2012, independent traffic engineers conducted a similar speed study on East Lakeshore Drive and reached the same conclusion resulting in a recommendation to raise the speed limit. At that time, the Town rejected

the recommendation and left the speed limit at 30mph, which is only 5mph higher than what can legally be posted on a public roadway in the State of Vermont.

An evaluation of accident data and crash reports was also conducted. Generally speaking, East Lakeshore Drive would not be considered a high accident location. Of the accidents that have occurred along this roadway, there is not an apparent relationship to vehicle speeds. Therefore, changing speed limits or the speed at which the majority of the public are operating at would not likely result in a change in the number, type, and severity of motor vehicle accidents currently being experienced on East Lakeshore Drive.

The traffic study conducted has however produced some valuable information that will be used to better manage the smaller percentage of drivers that continue to operate at unreasonable speeds along East Lakeshore Drive. The data identifies specific days of the week, times of day, and direction of travel associated with these drivers. The Police Department will use this information to strategically design enforcement programs with increased presence at these times to curb this behavior.

Thank you to those who brought these concerns to our attention. Please know we are committed to making our Town a safe place for all, and would remind everyone to drive safely at all times.